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# Achieving Access: Designing a Museum Accessibility Consulting Firm

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# Achieving Access: Designing a Museum Accessibility Consulting Firm

Keywords: Accessibility, Museum Studies, Consultant, Disabilities, Americans with Disabilities Act

by  
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Capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Museum Studies

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## Abstract

This capstone paper explores the need for an accessibility consulting firm to help museums and cultural institutions implement Americans with Disabilities Act policy adherence, universal design and accessible programming that increases the inclusion of people with disabilities in their organizations. The paper begins with a literature review that synthesizes the history of disability legislation and its relationship to museums, explores how museums can go beyond legal compliance and discusses the infrastructure suggested to implement accessibility efforts in an institution. The paper then proposes a project to create an accessibility consulting firm that assists museums in achieving their accessibility goals and the design of an “Accessibility Toolkit” that packages checklists, policies and program curriculum that is customizable to each institution.

Keywords: Accessibility, Museum Studies, Consultant, Disabilities, Americans with Disabilities Act

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout my experience with museums, I have sought to create an environment that inspires and engages the community through education and programming. I became fascinated with the impact that museums can have on people's lives, especially underserved audiences. I began noticing that many institutions were not serving people with disabilities as well as they could and that dedicated "Access Departments" were few and far between. While interning with a nonprofit that provides arts opportunities to human service agencies, I connected more deeply with the disability community and experienced firsthand the positive effects that the arts deliver. My goal for this project was to find a place where I can fit into both the museum and accessibility community. Drawing from my previous business experience, I attempted to find an external solution to this topic. What I discovered was that although the museum field at large discusses the need and desire to make institutions accessible to all audiences, many institutions are not in a position to implement these programs. This capstone proposes a museum accessibility consulting firm, MuseumAbility Consulting, which offers a solution to the lack of in-house accessibility staff.

Legislation prohibiting the exclusion and discrimination of people with disabilities, including the American's with Disabilities Act of 1990, has been in place for nearly six decades. Progress has been made to architectural barriers, the field of Universal Design, and services offered. However, despite these advancements, many cultural institutions are still struggling to comply with ADA mandates, go beyond basic adherence, or include people with disabilities in every aspect of their organizations. As pillars of the community and public spaces that promote diversity and inclusion, the museum field should aim

higher. Aside from being a legal obligation, there are numerous reasons to improve facilities and programs for people with disabilities. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, 56.7 million Americans have a disability, making up nineteen percent of the population and increasing as the baby boomers age. It is the largest minority in the United States and the only minority that anyone can join at any given time, whether temporarily or permanently. Accessible changes to facilities, such as wheelchair ramps and extra seating in gallery spaces, are improvements that all visitors can enjoy. Additional educational programming, such as specialized tours, can further expand an institution's inclusive efforts.

My capstone paper begins with a literature review which surveys the history of accessibility legislation, defines key terms used throughout the project, such as "accessibility," "disabilities," and "universal design" and describes the role of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 on museums and cultural institutions. I discuss the strides that have been made since the mandate passed and the need for institutions to go beyond compliance. The chapter concludes with recommendations for implementing accessibility initiatives as suggested by the National Endowment for the Arts' *Design for Accessibility*, *A Cultural Administrator's Handbook* and John Salmen's seminal text, *Everyone's Welcome: The Americans with Disabilities Act and Museums*. Both texts recommend that museums employ an in-house Accessibility Coordinator who can write and enforce policies, promote accessibility efforts between departments, and remain up to date with changes in legislation and standards. These authors imply that volunteers or other part-time staff members can perform the responsibilities of this position. I argue against this notion, suggesting that the role of an Accessibility Coordinator would be better filled by an

accessibility consultant with the expertise and experience needed to uphold the legal requirements and field-wide best practices.

The third chapter proposes the development of a business plan for a museum accessibility consulting firm (MuseumAbility Consulting). The project seeks to offer a solution to cultural institutions struggling to fill the role of an in-house Accessibility Coordinator. An accessibility consulting firm might be a cost-effective way to provide a necessary service for legal compliance and more – helping museums find ways to increase access in meaningful ways through education, programming and exhibition design, while modeling standards to increase and advocate for greater inclusion nationwide. The proposal imagines the scope and services of the company. The goals of the project are: to encourage institutions to go beyond ADA compliance in order to provide museum experiences to people with disabilities; to promote organizational self-sufficiency by incorporating accessibility into each aspect of the institution to maintain on-going compliance; and to develop an Accessibility Toolkit that can be offered to organizations for a customizable accessibility implementation plan. The project proposal also provides objectives that will help MuseumAbility achieve each of its proposed goals. Following the proposal, is a chapter which consists of an action plan with a timetable, schedule of the project implementation, paired with a Gantt chart. This paper concludes with a summary of the issue and the proposed project, describes potential measures of success and imagines a future vision for the project. Several appendices follow, including an annotated bibliography, description of project stakeholders, a sample job description for an Accessibility Coordinator, and proposed start-up costs for the company.



This capstone is my attempt to improve museum accessibility by offering a solution in the form of an outsourced consulting business. MuseumAbility Consulting is conceived of more than a revenue-driven enterprise—its goal is to remove barriers, advocate for and increase accessible opportunities for people with disabilities in cultural institutions. Its intention is to offer affordable counsel to improving facilities, exhibitions, programming and administration in a way that best suits each unique client. By creating an Accessibility Toolkit, MuseumAbility will collect, update and distribute a compendium of existing, timeworn data and present it in a clear and organized manner that will benefit the field. The customizable toolkit can be used across a full spectrum of cultural institutions, serving as a model for other types of organizations. This feasible solution to a growing problem will hopefully encourage other public sectors to increase their accessible efforts, creating a fully inclusive environment for people with disabilities everywhere.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

During the second half of the twentieth century, the United States saw the emergence of the disability rights movement. Several legislative initiatives prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities and set national standards for accessibility. Museums and cultural institutions began increasing the ways that their facilities, exhibitions, and programming could accommodate the disability community. Despite these advancements, many authors have argued that there is a "considerable distance to go before equality for disabled people is fully embedded in museum thinking, practices and organizational values" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 60). Several institutions have model accessibility programs, but many are failing to go beyond legal compliance, and some are failing to meet even minimum standards (Beinvenu, 2015; McGinnis, 2007; Smith et al., 2012). Twenty-six years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, museums, and cultural institutions should be striving to collectively increase access for people with disabilities, fulfilling their role as public institutions and pillars of communities. In this literature review, I define the key terms often associated with museum accessibility and discuss the legislative history of disability rights, Universal Design, and accessibility standards. This literature review also explores suggestions for implementing accessibility into museums, examines what is already in place, and concludes by identifying future needs. By considering the existing literature and legislation, we can envision what type of program or organization could assist museums with improving accessibility for visitors.

## Terminology & Background

### Access

“Accessibility” has various meanings in the museum field. At the fundamental level, it means “making the site’s exhibits and programs available to all visitors” (Salmen, 1998, p. 3). The word is also used in the context of collections – providing digital access or catalogues for searching a collection (Starr, 2016). Furthermore, the term “accessibility” is used when discussing people with disabilities regarding “compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design” (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Another common term used to describe opportunities provided to diverse audiences (i.e. people with disabilities) is “inclusive,” which will also be used throughout this paper (Starr, 2016). For the purpose of this project, I will use the term “access” or “accessibility” to define the various ways that museums and cultural institutions not only accommodate, but engage people with disabilities.

### Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (1990) defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such an individual, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment.” According to the 2012 United States Census Bureau Report, roughly 56.7 million people have a disability, accounting for nineteen percent of the population. There are several types of disabilities including, mobility, visual, hearing, and cognitive (Salmen, 1998, p. 5). Disabilities may not always be visible; therefore, a focus on removing barriers and preventing exclusionary practices from occurring is the first step in creating an inclusive museum (McGinnis, 2007, p. 140). Today, it is most widely accepted to use the

“social model” of disability to describe this community. “According to this model, the inclusion of people with disabilities can only stem from a change in current values, beliefs, cultures, practices, and ways of thinking” (Reich, 2014, p. 14). The social model advocates for removing the barriers that exclude people with disabilities in everyday life and suggests that inaccessible environments are the disabling source, not a medical problem (Starr, 2016, p. 8).

### Legislative History and Accessibility Standards

The last fifty years of the twentieth century was a significant time for civil rights activism in the United States. Following World War II, veterans returning from war with disabilities advocated for equal access to employment, housing, education, programs, and services (Stevens, 2015, p. 26). This activism stemmed the disability rights movement which led to the passage of important legislative measures. While extensive literature is available about the disability rights movement, three pieces of federal legislation impacted cultural institutions: The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These laws promote equality, set standards to remove physical barriers, prohibit discrimination and increase opportunities for people with disabilities.

The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA) was the first major legislative enactment that required public buildings to remove barriers and accommodate people with physical disabilities. The ABA mandates “cultural organizations that use federal funds to design, construct or alter a building must comply with a minimum level of physical access” (NEA Design for Accessibility, 2003, p. 16). This legislation applies only to physical barriers. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 required that any cultural organization receiving

federal funding must make employment opportunities, programs, services, and activities accessible, (National Endowment for the Arts, 2003, p. 17). The sections outlined by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibit discrimination, enforce the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, promote inclusion of people with disabilities for federally funded programs and activities, and requires electronic information provided by the federal government to be accessible. Specifically, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 "mandates that federal financial support of institutions that are operated by federal agencies are required to make their programs when viewed in their entirety, accessible to all qualified people with disabilities. " (Salmen, 1998, p. 9). Museums and cultural institutions that receive federal grants must comply with this decree.

The most comprehensive legislation is The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) (1990), which combines previous laws to provide a national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against people with disabilities. It intends to provide people with disabilities the same opportunities available to other citizens and promote the integration of individuals with disabilities into all aspects of society (Salmen, 1998, p. 8). The federal civil rights law recognized the continual discrimination towards people with disabilities including "outright, intentional exclusion, the discriminatory effects of architectural, transportation, and communication barriers, overprotective rules and policies, failure to make modifications to existing facilities and practices, exclusionary qualification standards and criteria, segregation, and relegation to lesser services, programs, activities, benefits, jobs, or other opportunities" (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 1990). The ADA (and its subsequent amendments in 2009 and 2014) requires the compliance of cultural organizations whether they receive federal funding or not. It

establishes standards for accessible design to be applied to the planning, construction, and alteration of buildings and facilities to ensure compliance with specific levels of accessibility. It also names the Department of Justice and a National Access Board responsible for enforcing the standards. Museums are required to keep records of “good faith” accessibility efforts and can be fined for non-compliance.

Documents such as the National Endowment for the Arts’ *Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator’s Handbook*, the American Association of Museums’ *Everyone’s Welcome: The Americans with Disabilities Act and Museums*, and the U.S. Department of Justice’s *2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design* are thorough references to legal compliance and explain the standards that museums and cultural institutions should adhere to. While the law is a good place to start, some argue that “the achievement of access for disabled people in museums should not be reduced to a response to legal imperatives” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 69). In fact, by imposing legal standards, institutions may only focus on the minimum requirements as opposed to “fostering a climate in which genuine concern for full equality of rights is embedded” (Smith et al., 2012, p. 69).

## Universal Design

A way that cultural institutions improve accessibility beyond legal compliance is by including Universal Design in their exhibitions and programming. Universal Design is “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” (National Endowment for the Arts, 2003b, p.11). Universal Design has created accessibility standards that increase the usability of the built environment for people with disabilities (Maisel, 2010, p.11).

Universal Design aligns with the social model of inclusion

—removing the environmental barriers that exclude people with disabilities from participating in the same way that everyone else does (McGinnis, 2007). Similar to integrating ADA policy into cultural institutions, several publications have been provided to standardize Universal Design. The ADA itself provides a set of standardizations (2010). The Smithsonian published their *Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design (n.d.)* which provides best practices for accessible exhibition design topics ranging from lighting and text labels to audiovisual and digital presentations. Additionally, North Carolina State University's "Center for Universal Design" in Raleigh, NC is a national research center that is continually developing and improving the field.

## Museums and Accessibility

### Why Accessibility?

The topic of Museum Accessibility has garnered a lot of attention in recent years. In 2015, the United States celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The American Alliance of Museums dedicated the fall issue of its magazine *Museum* to the subject, discussing what museums have accomplished since 1990 and future directions of the field. Furthermore, the American Alliance of Museums listed "diversity, accessibility and inclusion in all aspects of museum structure and programming" as a top focus of their 2016 – 2020 Strategic Plan (2016). They cite accessibility as being vital to the future viability, relevance, and sustainability of museums (p. 1).

Why should museums strive to be more accessible? Aside from being legally required, there are other compelling reasons. Twenty-first-century museums have a social responsibility to include and engage as many visitors as possible (Starr, 2016). People with disabilities are the fastest growing minority, representing one in six Americans. Not only

does this number make up a significant percentage of the U.S. population, but the number of people with disabilities is on the rise. "According to the Census Bureau, the Baby Boom population is turning 65 at a rate of 10,000 per day, and by 2030, 20 percent of the US population will be over 65, which will potentially increase the number of people with diminished eyesight, hearing, mobility and cognition" (Bienvenu, 2015, p. 30). Studies also estimate that the income of people with disabilities surpasses \$1 trillion, with \$220 billion in spending power. The disposable income of this group could equal significant potential museum revenue. Also, nearly one-third of the approximately 70 million families in the United States includes at least one person with a disability (McGinnis, 2007, p. 140). By providing accessible facilities and programs, institutions can expand and diversify their audiences while better serving whole families and increasing their admission revenue.

Furthermore, implementing accessibility options benefits all visitors, not just those with disabilities. Ramps can help wheelchair users as well as families with strollers; additional seating accommodates anyone suffering from museum fatigue, families or the elderly; large type on exhibit labels can benefit people who are low-vision and those reading from a distance because of crowds. (McGinnis, 2007, p. 140). "A person does not have to be disabled to benefit from access. When incorporating access into the design and construction of its facilities and the execution of its programs, the museums eliminates the stigma associated with 'special services' or accommodations" (Salmen, 1998, pg. 4). Museums should integrate accessibility into every aspect of their institution, encouraging every staff member to be responsible for inclusion (National Endowment for the Arts, 2003, 10).



## Going Beyond Compliance

The legal requirements set by the Americans with Disabilities Act should be considered the minimum standards to meet. Museum Accessibility should be expanded to include people with disabilities in every aspect of museums and not just as an afterthought (Bienvenu, 2015; Smith et al., 2012;). "The short-term goal is compliance with the law's minimum requirements. The longer-term, universal-design goal is totally accessible programs and facilities at every level." (Salmen, 1998, p. 34). Janice Majewski and Lonnie Bunch expand on this goal with their vision of inclusion. They believe there are three tiers that museums should address to increase inclusion: access to the physical environment (minimum), access to the content (offering a variety of interpretation tools), and access to history and culture (incorporating the stories, experiences and opinions of people with disabilities) (Smith et al. 2012; Majewski et al. 1998). Majewski and Bunch advocate that museums should look beyond reluctant obedience and "address learning styles, multisensory approaches, and reflections of the history and resources of those who are audience, whether they are standing with service animals or seated in wheelchairs" (Majewski & Bunch, 1998, p. 160).

Many museums already offer assistive listening devices, large print programs, communication in braille, sign language interpretation, and wheelchair accessibility. These programs are legally required and should be planned and budgeted for (McGinnis, 2007, p. 141). These options are referred to as "reasonable adjustments" and offered by many institutions, however, they are only meeting the minimum requirement (Smith et al., 2012). To go beyond ADA adherence, museums can also include people with disabilities into programming and exhibitions. For example, offering touch tours for visitors who are blind

or low vision like those provided at the Art Institute of Chicago or specialized programming opportunities for visitors with learning and developmental disabilities like the Metropolitan Museum of Arts' *Discoveries* workshops (McGinnis, 2007). By providing a wider range of interpretive options, museums can open access to exhibition content and improve visitor experience for more people, with varying abilities. Universal Design can also offer solutions for inclusive education and programming. Rebecca McGinnis of the Metropolitan Museum of Art encourages designing exhibitions and programs with all visitors in mind. She suggests presenting exhibition information in several formats (i.e. large print, audio, and braille), incorporating multimodal approaches, offering options for specialized programming, and creating a welcoming environment (McGinnis, 2007, p. 142). By providing various forms of communication and levels of participation in exhibitions and programming, museums are anticipating human differences and allow people with disabilities to experience the museum the same way that anyone else would – without having to ask for special accommodations, which is the goal of Universal Design.

### Where to Start?

As discussed above, accessibility is both a legal and social obligation for cultural institutions. By providing accessible features, museums will increase their audiences while simultaneously benefitting all visitors. How can museums implement accessibility initiatives? The American Association of Museums' *Everyone's Welcome* nine-step strategy provides an easy to follow, comprehensive guide for implementing ADA standards into cultural institutions. The steps are:

1. Include a statement of commitment to accessibility in the museum's general policy or mission statement.

2. Designate an Accessibility Coordinator
3. Obtain input from people with disabilities
4. Train staff on accessibility
5. Conduct a review of facilities and programs
6. Implement short and long term institution-wide accessibility (program accessibility, barrier removal, effective communication, new construction, and alterations)
7. Promote and advertise accessibility in the museum
8. Establish a grievance process
9. Conduct ongoing review of accessibility efforts

A 2012 case study *The Inclusive Art Museum: Determining Disability Access* proves that this strategy -- despite being over fifteen years old -- is still successful. The author concludes: "if art museums utilize Salmen's nine steps to disability, not only will museums become more accessible, they also will be better equipped to provide richer learning experiences for all people, not just people with disabilities" (McMillen, 2012, p. 1). The National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) *Accessibility Planning and Resource Guide for Cultural Administrators* (2003) offers similar strategies. The NEA suggests institutions designate an Accessibility Coordinator, create an access advisory group, adopt a policy statement and grievance procedure, evaluate organization's accessibility, develop an access plan, train staff, enforce ADA compliance, and promote and market accessibility. Several other resources provide tips and tools for increasing accessibility, echoing the two strategies listed above.

## Conclusion

Despite recent efforts and the availability of materials and handbooks for creating accessible cultural institutions, many museums are still failing to fulfill even the legal

requirements of disability access (McMillen, 2012). Case studies performed in 2012 (McMillen) and 2014 (Reich) conclude that there is still work to be done. Beth Bienvenu of the American Alliance of Museums agrees, claiming “there is still much to be done to involve those with disabilities in the curatorial, content and decision-making activities of museums” (Bienvenu, 2015, p. 30). Christine Reich (2014) argues that despite efforts made towards accessibility and inclusion over the past 20 years, the field remains unchanged.

Both Salmen and the NEA suggest that to accomplish institutional accessibility, museums should hire an Accessibility Coordinator<sup>1</sup>. This position is required to lead the organization’s accessible initiatives and ensure that the organization is ADA compliant. The Americans with Disabilities Act, Title II, Chapter 2 requires that institutions designate an ADA coordinator who is responsible for being the legal contact and access facilitator. The NEA notes that the Accessibility Coordinator “should consider using access consultants” since financial limitations often require the position to fulfill other job tasks that limit the amount of time they can dedicate to access alone (National Endowment for the Arts, 2003, p. 45). Several authors argue that accessibility implementation can be divided up among several employees or undertaken by a museum volunteer (Salmen, 1998; McGinnis, 2007; McMillen, 2012). However, “as cultural institutions face difficult financial times and the need to achieve more with fewer resources, there is a danger that specialist expertise in the field of access is lost” (Smith et al., 2012). The policies and procedures of disability accessibility require in-depth knowledge and regular training. To effectively enhance inclusion and remain up-to-date on legislation and best practices, the role requires more

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix C for the National Endowment for the Arts’ complete job description for an Accessibility Consultant.

than a volunteer or to be divided up among existing employees with other full-time responsibilities.

Yet the question remains: With such a strong legal and ethical mandate as well as the availability of toolkits and guides provided by organizations such as The National Endowment for the Arts, The American Alliance of Museums and the Smithsonian, why are so many institutions still failing to include people with disabilities successfully? Case studies have amply documented the legal requirements, the social mission of museums, the growing disability population with disposable income, and yet, there is still a lack of inclusion 26 years post-Americans with Disabilities Act. While several museums have exemplary Accessibility programs, many don't have the dedicated staff or departments to implement policy and procedure or design inclusive educational programming effectively. In the next chapter, I explore a practical solution for cultural institutions struggling to fill the role of an in-house accessibility coordinator. An accessibility consulting firm might be a cost-effective way to provide a necessary service for legal compliance and more – helping museums find ways to increase access in meaningful ways through education, programming and exhibition design, while modeling standards to increase and advocate for greater inclusion nationwide. This literature review helps to inform a project that seeks to investigate the feasibility of developing the firm that I propose in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Proposal

As discussed in the previous chapter, improving accessibility for people with disabilities is an important change that museums should make for many reasons. Accessibility is a legal requirement thanks to legislative mandates such as the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Collectively, these laws prohibit the discrimination of people with disabilities and enforce the removal of physical barriers in public spaces. By improving their facilities and programs, museums welcome this growing minority and previously underserved audience. Making accessible changes to exhibitions, education, programming, and administration benefit all visitors, not just those with disabilities. The federal cultural agency, the National Endowment for the Arts and the professional association, the American Alliance of Museums suggest that museums hire an Accessibility Coordinator, a position responsible for the accessible efforts of the institution, to meet this mandate. Several authors (Salmen; McMillen) argue that the duties of this role can be shared by a group of volunteers or added to the responsibilities of existing staff members, yet also emphasize the expertise required to perform the tasks surrounding disability compliance. Unfortunately, due to limited resources, the suggestion of hiring a dedicated staff member as an Accessibility Coordinator or developing an entire an Access Department is not feasible for many organizations and the expertise required to enforce legal requirements should not be the responsibility of a volunteer. The population of people with disabilities continues to rise, and museums are becoming increasingly interested in including this audience, yet more needs to be accomplished. An outside consultant could help

organizations achieve their goals of increasing diversity and including visitors with disabilities.

## The Project

I propose the development of a business plan for a museum accessibility consulting firm (MuseumAbility Consulting). This project seeks to offer a solution to cultural institutions struggling to fill the role of an in-house Accessibility Coordinator.

MuseumAbility Consulting will perform the responsibilities of this position with the expertise and dedicated time that a part-time staff member or volunteers are unable to. By outsourcing this role, museums and cultural institutions will ensure that they are operating with the most up-to-date compliance and best practice standards. MuseumAbility will provide a necessary service while encouraging museums to go beyond legal adherence by providing creative solutions for increasing access in meaningful ways while modeling standards for improving and advocating for greater inclusion nationwide. MuseumAbility will be comprised of a team of industry experts who will assess current facilities and programs and provide solutions for integrating accessibility initiatives into facilities, educational programming, exhibitions, and administration. MuseumAbility will offer an expansive list of services that tailor to the varying needs and desires of cultural organizations. These services include conducting ADA compliance checks, writing accessibility policies, performing staff and volunteer disability etiquette training, making universal design suggestions for facilities and exhibitions, and creating interactive educational programming for audiences with specific disabilities. MuseumAbility seeks to

accommodate organizations of all sizes and will offer creative solutions that fit the needs of each unique situation and budget.

MuseumAbility will designate a Disability Community Advisory Board comprised of individuals representing different disabilities to advise MuseumAbility on projects.

Minding the popular disability community motto: “Nothing About Us, Without Us,”<sup>2</sup>

MuseumAbility will to include the disability community in its business and program development to ensure that the needs and wants of the community are being met. The role of the Advisory Board is to provide guidance and opinion on best practices and review the services provided by MuseumAbility. Board membership will be volunteer-based, comprised of individuals who are passionate about increasing accessibility and lending their expertise to the business. The Advisory Board will convene quarterly to review MuseumAbility’s upcoming initiatives. Additionally, the Disability Community Advisory Board will connect clients to the community, helping to supply audiences for programs and potential employees or volunteers with disabilities to clients. MuseumAbility will streamline the process of implementing an accessibility plan by creating an “Accessibility Toolkit” that includes a package of customizable checklists, training tools and program curriculum. The contents of the Accessibility Toolkit will be collected, written and reviewed by the Disability Community Advisory Board as well as other museum accessibility professionals.

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<sup>2</sup> “Nothing About Us, Without Us” is a phrase with origins rooted in activist movements. In the 1990’s it was used to describe disability oppression and empowerment, and has lent itself to several disability rights themed book titles. It’s meaning for the disability community is the proclamation that people with disabilities know what is best for themselves.



MuseumAbility will operate as an unincorporated Limited Liability Partnership<sup>3</sup> (LLC) agency. The Company will charge clients consulting fees of varying rates that are dependent on the consultant's expertise, credentials, and the scope of the project. MuseumAbility will perform its services in a series of phases as determined during the initial proposal when establishing the scope of accessibility integration and program development with the client. Initially, MuseumAbility will meet the client and perform an assessment at no cost. MuseumAbility may also establish a retainer fee<sup>4</sup> that allows them to provide continuous advice following the implementation of the accessibility program. MuseumAbility may outsource services to independent contractors who have additional expertise in a particular subject. In this instance, MuseumAbility will take a percentage of the outsourced expert's rate. MuseumAbility will perform a needs assessment to determine potential clients during a period of prospecting and develop a marketing strategy consisting of industry outreach and advertising initiatives.

The project will deliver several components. The first is an action plan and GANTT chart outlining the project timeline. Second, a business plan will describe the general operation of MuseumAbility, including an operating budget, consulting fee structure, needs assessment, description of services provided, marketing plan, description of staff and areas of expertise. The project will also include a sample client prospectus detailing the schedule of phases and fees of a project and possible examples of checklists and documents that may be contained in the customizable Accessibility Toolkit.

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<sup>3</sup> A Limited Liability Company is an unincorporated private limited company comprised of at least one principle partner who assumes unlimited liability for the business. They require at least two shareholders, and the LLC will distribute all profits and losses to them. It is a business structure that combines the taxation of a sole proprietorship with the limited liability of a corporation.

<sup>4</sup> A retainer agreement is a contract between a company and a consultant in which the client pays a fee in advance for work to be specified and performed later.

## Vision

MuseumAbility Consulting seeks to make institutions accessible to audiences with disabilities by implementing ADA standards, developing strategies for inclusion and providing clients with the tools to create an inclusive museum.

## Goals

1. Encourage institutions to go beyond ADA compliance in order to provide museum experiences to audiences with disabilities.

### Objectives:

- Assist the organization in developing creative and interactive programs and accessible exhibition content
- Pilot and evaluate new programming
- Connect the organization with audiences for programs

MuseumAbility Consulting will offer a range of services to assist organizations in meeting their individual accessibility goals but will advocate for deeper engagement through programming and education. As the previous chapter discussed, accessibility efforts should go beyond ADA compliance and support a fully inclusive environment, integrating people with disabilities into every aspect of the museum. While the first step in accessibility is legal compliance, MuseumAbility will encourage its clients to go further by offering assistance in designing inclusive exhibition content and educational programming.

After ensuring that the institution's facilities and services meet the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act, MuseumAbility will work in close collaboration with the institution's exhibition and education departments to implement inclusive exhibition

content and design educational programs for audiences with specific disabilities. Inclusive exhibition design may include providing various forms of content to promote multimodal learning, such as large-print guides, audio description or tactile elements. Inclusive programs will be interactive, educational experiences that cater to the needs of each unique audience. Examples of programming may include conversational tours for visitors with dementia and their caregivers or a docent tour followed by an interactive art-making activity for people with developmental disabilities.

MuseumAbility will seek advice from its Disability Community Advisory Board to ensure that exhibition design and programs are relevant to each particular audience. The Disability Community Advisory Board will also connect the client to members of the disability community to provide an audience for pilot testing<sup>5</sup> the educational content and programs, allowing MuseumAbility to make necessary adjustments during the development phase. Additionally, MuseumAbility will assist the organization in marketing their accessible efforts by working with their marketing and communication departments to create strategies for reaching audiences who will benefit from their inclusive exhibitions and educational programs.

2. Promote organizational self-sufficiency by incorporating accessibility into every aspect of each institution to maintain on-going compliance.

Objectives:

- Educate and train staff and volunteers on disability etiquette
- Establish an internal task force to continue accessible efforts

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<sup>5</sup> Pilot testing a program means to perform a trial run, evaluate effectiveness, and make appropriate changes before officially launching a program to public audiences.

- Help the institution recruit an Access Advisory Committee

Since MuseumAbility Consulting will only be able to provide service to its clients for a limited amount of time, they will provide tools that ensure the client continues its accessibility efforts after the terms of the contract period have ended. As a component of the contracted agreement, MuseumAbility will perform annual assessments to ensure that the facilities and programs are operating at the current standards and all policies are updated with any new mandates. Additionally, the client may request to keep MuseumAbility on a retainer contract to receive on-demand advice or counsel.

In an effort to establish access issues into daily operations of the museum without the consultant, MuseumAbility will educate and train the client's staff and volunteers on disability etiquette and best practices. This training will vary for different departments but seeks to empower each member of the staff to think about including people with disabilities while performing their daily job duties. For example, guest services and volunteers may receive training on disability etiquette and communication best practices to provide a welcoming environment for visitors with disabilities; curatorial or exhibition departments may be trained on current universal design standards such as pedestal heights, inclusive label writing techniques, etc.; and administrative staff may receive training on hiring or recruiting people with disabilities for staff and volunteer positions and review legislative policy standards. MuseumAbility will provide the administration with training tools so the client can continually offer training sessions to new staff members. If requested by the institution, MuseumAbility can provide additional educational training sessions for staff, volunteers, board members or other constituents for an hourly consulting fee of \$250 plus expenses.

Additionally, MuseumAbility will establish an internal task force within the organization. The internal task force will be comprised of staff members from different departments in the organization. MuseumAbility will develop references and guides to provide the internal task force with the tools to assess and enforce accessibility when MuseumAbility's contracted period is over. This team of staff members will be advocates for accessibility in the museum and promote accessibility issues throughout facilities, education, exhibitions, and administration. They will continually assess and evaluate the accessibility of the institution's facilities and programs and serve as liaisons between MuseumAbility and the institution.

Finally, MuseumAbility will connect the organization with members of the disability community and advise the client in creating an Access Advisory Committee. The Committee will include people with various disabilities, staff, and board members. MuseumAbility will establish duties and functions of the committee as they fit into the organization's governance. The committee will advise the institution on best practices for the community when developing future programs or exhibitions. These members will serve as experts on the needs of their disability community. The Access Advisory Committee may also assist the institution with outreach to people in the community with disabilities, composing a pool of potential source for employees and volunteers with disabilities as well as participants for accessible programming.

### 3. Develop a customizable Accessibility Toolkit

#### Objectives:

- Create a collection of checklists, training guides, program curriculum for customization
- Test and evaluate the Accessibility Toolkit
- Promote and share the customizable toolkit with cultural institutions nationally.

MuseumAbility Consulting will create a customizable Accessibility Toolkit to streamline their services and increase the number of organizations they can impact. The Accessibility Toolkit will feature a collection of assessments, checklists, training guides and educational programming curriculum that MuseumAbility can easily tailor to the unique needs of each institution. The creation of these materials will provide MuseumAbility with an efficient assessment process and serve as a model for future accessibility integration efforts. By streamlining the process and compiling the necessary tools into one location, MuseumAbility will be able to assist more institutions in their accessible efforts. The Accessibility Toolkit will be developed using guides and tools made available from resources such as the National Endowment for the Arts' *Design for Accessibility, a Cultural Administrator's Handbook* (2003) and the American Association of Museums' *Everyone's Welcome: The Americans with Disabilities Act and Museums* (1998). MuseumAbility will convene its Disability Community Advisory Board, other accessibility professionals, and museum partners to compile the most accurate and up-to-date tool.

Following the development of the Accessibility Toolkit, MuseumAbility will partner with three institutions to test and evaluate the product. The institutions will provide

feedback, and MuseumAbility will make any necessary adjustments. Once approved by all constituents, MuseumAbility will market the product for use in the field. MuseumAbility will promote the Toolkit through community outreach and industry-related conferences. MuseumAbility will sell The Toolkit for a fee, which is to be determined during its development phase. The toolkit can be purchased by institutions to use on their own or to be paired with more formal consultation services provided by MuseumAbility. The Toolkit seeks to provide a streamlined and affordable solution for institutions who wish to become more accessible. MuseumAbility hopes that the toolkit will increase accessibility throughout the cultural sector by providing a simplified “how-to” reference for organizations, and will allow MuseumAbility the opportunity to serve more clients.

## Chapter 4: Action Plan

### MuseumAbility Consulting – ACTION PLAN

Beginning: January 1, 2017

Project Manager: Owner, MuseumAbility Consulting

Funding: During the start-up phase, all costs will be assumed by the general operating budget, funded by the Project Manager.

| ACTION   | RESOURCES                                    | TIMESCALE | DEADLINE         | NOTES  |
|--|--|-----------|------------------|--|
| 1. Initial Business Development  |  |           |                  |  |
| Create a revenue plan  | Owner, financial advisors                    | 1 month   | January 31, 2017 | Establish consulting fees and startup costs  |
| Perform market research to identify the needs of the community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct focus groups and interviews of museum employees and members of the disability community</li> <li>Compile data to for use in business plan</li> </ul> | Owner, disability community, museum contacts | 3 months  | March 31, 2017   | Depending on schedules of interviewees, this may take less time to gather. Payment of interviewees may be appropriate (\$50 for an hour or two).                         |
| Write a business plan  | Owner  | 1 month   | April 30, 2017   |  |
| Register business name <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Search and file with Pennsylvania Department of State</li> </ul>   | Owner  | 1 week    | April 7, 2017    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Filing fee in Pennsylvania is \$70</li> <li>May register online</li> </ul>  |
| File a Certificate of Organization Domestic Limited Liability Company  | Owner  | 2 weeks   | May 15, 2017     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Filing fee is \$125</li> <li>May file online or by mail</li> <li>May take 3 – 10 business days to receive confirmation</li> </ul> |
| Obtain business licenses and permits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Register with Philadelphia Department of Revenue</li> <li>EIN Number for tax purposes</li> </ul>   | Owner  | 2 weeks   | May 31, 2017     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Filing fee is \$0</li> </ul>  |
| Determine experts for outsourcing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See Appendix B - Stakeholders</li> </ul>  | Owner  | 3 months  | August 31, 2017  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify potential experts to outsource to</li> <li>Establish contracts and service fees</li> </ul>                               |
| Develop and implement a marketing strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Print and distribute business cards/branding</li> </ul>  | Owner  | 3 months  | August 31, 2017  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This process will be ongoing</li> </ul>   |



| ACTION  | RESOURCES                                       | TIMESCALE | DEADLINE          | NOTES  |
|---|---|-----------|-------------------|--|
| materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create social media pages</li> <li>Identify and solicit prospective clients</li> </ul>   |   |           |                   |  |
| 2. Establish a Disability Community Advisory Board (DCAB)   |   |           |                   |  |
| Recruit community members   | Owner   | On-going  |                   | Would ideally like to have 8-10 board members                                  |
| Hold First Meeting  | Owner, DCAB                                     |           | June 1, 2017      |  |
| 3. Perform first consultation   | Owner   | 6 months  | December 31, 2017 | This initial consult will be performed at a discounted rate to establish brand |
| Partner with first institution (Museum #1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet with Museum #1 executives to discuss institutions needs and desires</li> <li>They will complete a self-assessment</li> </ul> |   |           |                   |  |
| Perform initial site visit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess facilities and programs</li> </ul>   | Owner, Museum #1 executives                     | 2 weeks   | August 1, 2017    |  |
| Convene with Disability Community Advisory Board  | Owner, DCAB                                     | 1 day     | August 7, 2017    | Discuss suggestions for improvement  |
| Write proposal based on improvements discovered during site visit and assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present report to Museum #1</li> </ul>  | Owner, Museum #1 executives                     | 2 weeks   | August 30, 2017   |  |
| Advise Museum #1 in implementing facility and administrative changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write ADA policy, architectural and universal design changes, etc.</li> </ul>                           | Owner, Museum #1 facilities, and administration | On-going  | December 31, 2017 |  |
| Help Museum #1 in designing Accessible programming for specific audiences   | Owner, Museum #1 Ed department                  | 3 months  | December 31, 2017 |  |
| Pilot program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DCAB will help provide audience for piloting</li> <li>Evaluate and adjust</li> </ul>   | Owner, Museum #1 Ed department                  | 1 month   | December 31, 2017 |  |
| Advise Museum #1 on marketing their Accessible programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing strategy</li> <li>DCAB will help museum with audience outreach</li> </ul>                                  | Owner, Museum #1 marketing department           | 1 month   | December 31, 2017 |  |
| 4. Integrate accessibility throughout to ensure self-sufficiency post-consultancy   | Owner   | On-going  | December 31, 2017 |  |

| ACTION   | RESOURCES                 | TIMESCALE   | DEADLINE           | NOTES   |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|--------------------|---|
| Train Museum #1 staff and volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disability Etiquette Training for all staff</li> <li>In-depth ADA training for administration</li> </ul> | Owner, Museum #1 staff    | 1 – 2 weeks | October 31, 2017   | This may occur for different departments over a span of several weeks                             |
| Recruit staff members from each department to establish an internal task-force   | Owner, Museum #1 staff    | 1 month     | November 30, 2017  |   |
| Help the museum convene their own Access Advisory Committee with members of the disability community to advise on future projects  | Owner, DCAB, Museum Board | 2 months    | December 31, 2017  |   |
| 5. Continue prospecting to secure more clients   | Owner                     | On-going    | -                  |   |
| 6. Develop Accessibility Toolkit   | Owner, DACB               | On-going    | December 31, 2018  | On-going project that will be developed and tested with new clients                               |
| Research and compile checklists and tool samples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use resources from Smithsonian, NEA, AAM</li> </ul>  | Owner                     | 2 months    | February 28, 2018  |   |
| Create checklists, training guides, and program curriculum   | Owner                     | 4 months    | April 30, 2018     | This will be an on-going collection and will be continually updated                               |
| 7. Test and Evaluate the toolkit   | Owner, DCAB, 3 Museums    | 3-4 months  | August 31, 2018    |   |
| Find 3 institutions to partner with for evaluation   | Owner, 3 Museums          | 1 month     | May 31, 2018       | These will either be former clients, or museums that MuseumAbility has a personal connection with |
| Convene with the Disability Community Access Board to discuss checklists and tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide feedback and suggestion for edits</li> </ul>       | Owner, DACB               | 1-2 months  | June 30, 2018      |   |
| Test customized checklists, training guides and program curriculum at 3 selected institutions  | Owner, 3 Museums          | 3-4 months  | September 30, 2018 |   |
| 8. Using evaluations, finalize Toolkit   | Owner                     | 1 month     | October 31, 2018   |   |
| 9. Market and promote Toolkit  | Owner                     | 3 months    | December 31, 2018  |   |

**MuseumAbility Consulting, LLC - Year 1**

[illegible]

**MuseumAbility Consulting, LLC**

Owner  
Owner & Stakeholders  
On-going

[illegible]

## Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

The growing population of people with disabilities suggests an urgency to implement changes to museum facilities, exhibitions, programs, and administration. Although the conversation of civil rights for people with disabilities has been ongoing since the mid-twentieth century, improvements are needed to eliminate discrimination and include people with disabilities into everyday opportunities. Museums, as community pillars and beacons of diversity and education, have a social obligation to make these improvements. Meeting legislative requirements is only the first step. Many museums boast excellent accessibility programs, yet most still don't have the dedicated staff or departments to implement policy and procedure or design inclusive educational programming. Many sources suggest an in-house Accessibility Coordinator, an option that is not feasible for every institution due to financial or organizational restrictions.

An outside consulting firm that specializes in museums and access is well-suited to fill this gap. My proposed firm, MuseumAbility Consulting can offer museums an affordable, specialized solution to expanding their accessible initiatives. MuseumAbility will work with clients to perform services that accomplish a range of attainable goals that are dependent on the needs, funding and infrastructure of the institution. MuseumAbility will carry out the duties of an Accessibility Coordinator – enforce ADA compliance, establish policies and protocols, train staff, design programming and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities into every aspect of the organization. The company will fulfill the needs of the museum community by providing a standardized and necessary service to improve accessibility throughout the field. MuseumAbility will serve a broad range of cultural

institutions, including but not limited to, art, history and science museums, aquariums, zoos, historic houses, and galleries.

MuseumAbility Consulting will be built through a number of phases. As depicted in chapter four's action plan, the business development phase will take last approximately one year. During this initial phase, MuseumAbility Consulting will operate as a small start-up consultancy. The company will develop its business and marketing plan, prospect potential local clients, and perform services for a limited number of museums in order to gain experience and to build its service portfolio. Given the small size of the company, the services of the firm will be performed solely by the owner and a limited number of outsourced experts. MuseumAbility will charge lowered consultancy fees in order to build a client list and reputation within the community. As the client list grows, MuseumAbility will have the opportunity to expand its staff. The company hopes to increase accessibility efforts in as many organizations as possible and will offer a flexible fee structure that allows institutions of every size and budget to benefit from its services. MuseumAbility plans to scale the same opportunities to both small and large institutions. The client will benefit from consultants who have up-to-date knowledge about resources, techniques and technologies that will help museums meet their goals and can help craft a cost-efficient plan to sustain access through the right combination of trained staff, volunteers and other providers.

The second phase of MuseumAbility Consulting is the development of its Accessibility Toolkit initiative. During this phase, MuseumAbility will research and compile existing and outdated resources, guides, and assessments into an updated, organized reference. MuseumAbility will consult with the disability community as well as other legal,

universal design, and education experts in the field to ensure the most current and up to date standards are set. The final stages of Accessibility Toolkit phase are to test and evaluate the product before releasing it the public. Following the year-long development of this tool, MuseumAbility will market and promote the product for a continuous period, continually updating and improving the resources as new developments are made. The toolkit will be available for clients to purchase on its own or to be used in conjunction with more formal MuseumAbility consulting services.

The success of this project will be measured by the achievement of MuseumAbility's goals. I anticipate that due to start-up expenses and discount consulting fees, MuseumAbility will generate only a small profit after the first one to two years. The company's initial success will, therefore, be measured by the number of clients it enlists as well as the attainment of services performed. MuseumAbility proposes to encourage museums to go beyond legal requirements and integrate accessibility into each aspect of the client's organization. During the MuseumAbility's consultation with the client, the company will create, pilot and execute creative programming and inclusive exhibition design elements for visitors with disabilities. If the programs help expand opportunities for the disability community, generate regular attendance, and receive positive feedback from visitors, then MuseumAbility will have reached its goal. It is important that MuseumAbility provides the education and programming departments facilitating accessible experiences with the tools to measure and evaluate success on their own following the terms of the consulting period. Additionally, MuseumAbility can perform annual (or more often, depending on the terms of the agreement) check-ins with the client to ensure that their programs and exhibitions are continuing to offer successful experiences.

MuseumAbility will gauge the achievement of its second goal—to promote organizational self-sufficiency by incorporating accessibility into each aspect of the institution to maintain on-going compliance—by again, performing regular check-ins following the completion of the consulting period. If MuseumAbility successfully trains its client's staff, organizes an internal accessibility task force, and helps recruit an Access Advisory Committee for the organization's board, then the client should be able to continue promoting inclusion following the terms of the consultancy. MuseumAbility will offer an annual review of the programs, policies and other accessible efforts to ensure that the client is operating with the most up-to-date information and best practices. MuseumAbility may also schedule staff, volunteer, or board training on a continuous basis if requested by the client. Other ongoing tasks may be performed if the client agrees to hire MuseumAbility on a retainer basis for additional projects or training performed after the consulting phase.

The final goal of MuseumAbility is the creation of its Accessibility Toolkit. The success of this goal is measured by the completion and effectiveness of the toolkit. After an estimated year of research, compilation, writing, and testing, MuseumAbility will have a finishing product to share with the rest of the museum community. MuseumAbility will test a draft version of the toolkit with its Disability Community Advisory Board as well as three volunteer organizations. After receiving feedback from its constituents, MuseumAbility will construct a final draft that will be promoted and shared through professional networks, conference attendance, and advertising. If new clients adopt the Accessibility Toolkit or recognized for its achievements in the industry, then MuseumAbility can consider its project a success.



The ultimate goal of this project is to provide a model of improving accessibility for people with disabilities nationally. After establishing itself in a local market, MuseumAbility will expand to provide services throughout the United States. This expansion will require a reevaluation of services offered, fees charged, staff members hired and a restructuring of the business. Strategically, this national implementation would occur within five years of MuseumAbility's conception. To promote its consulting services and Accessibility Toolkit, MuseumAbility will present at national field-related conferences such as the American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting, the Kennedy Center's Leadership Exchange in Art and Disability conference, as well as regional conferences and annual meetings. MuseumAbility will continue prospecting potential clients as it expands to new locations. It will expand its Disability Community Advisory Board to include members that are embedded in new market areas, continuing to broaden the network of its disability community. MuseumAbility will benefit the museum field at large by providing an affordable and attainable solution to cultural organization's accessibility needs. By offering a solution to the required legal adherence and accessible programming, MuseumAbility can set national standards for increasing accessibility. Providing museum experiences to this audience will also encourage other public spaces to enhance their accessibility efforts, providing more opportunities for people with disabilities, everywhere.

The purpose of my capstone was to explore a solution to the growing need for increased accessibility initiatives in the museum field. I believe that people with disabilities should be included in every aspect of the museum. This means thinking about inclusion from the start, and not as an afterthought. By making changes to barriers as well as integrating best practices, employing people with disabilities, and including their voices

and experiences, cultural institutions can achieve these aspirations. MuseumAbility will provide its clients with the tools to facilitate these changes and continue to advocate, educate and fight for the rights of people with disabilities to participate in and have a voice in our nation's museums.

## Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography

American Alliance of Museums (2016). *2016 – 2020 strategic plan*. February 2016.  
Retrieved from <http://www.aam-us.org/>.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) is a professional association that brings museums together, develops professional standards and sets best practices for the field of museology. I used their most recent strategic plan to emphasize the importance of accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities in the museum field. Since the AAM sets national standards for museums, their strategic plan will reflect future trends. Themes of accessibility appear in the AAM's values, beliefs, goals, focus areas.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-336, 104 Stat. 328 (1990).  
Retrieved August 28, 2016, from <https://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm>

This document is the public policy written to enforce equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. The legal document was first published in 1990 and most recently amended in 2008. The statute discusses the legality of employment, public services, public transportation, public accommodations, etc. while providing definitions of disability terms and findings. This source relates to my project because it establishes the legal requirements that public spaces must adhere to legally. While ADA compliance is the bare minimum that a museum can do to be accessible, it is the first step in creating an accessible institution. This document will provide all of the legal key terms that I define throughout my paper and serves as the backbone for all of the guidelines for accessible design.

Bienvenu, B. (2015). Museums and ADA@25: Progress and looking ahead. *Museum*, 94(5), 28-34.

Beth Bienvenu is the Director of the Office of Accessibility at the National Endowment for the Arts. This article appeared in the American Alliance of Museum's October 2015 issue of *Museum*, which was devoted to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Bienvenu's article discusses recent successful examples of inclusion in museums, provides historical information of the ADA's effect on museums, and offers solutions for implementing change in the future. Bienvenu's article discusses the practical application of ADA policy in the field while suggesting how museums can go beyond legal compliance in the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Maisel, J. L. (2010). *The state of the science in universal design: Emerging research and developments*. [Sharjah, U.A.E.]: Bentham Science Publishers.

This publication is a collection of articles written about different Universal Design topics. Universal Design is a movement that promotes greater accessibility in physical environments or design of products. Universal Design is used to create spaces that adhere to the ADA, and it helps set standards for height, width, text size, and more. The articles included in *The State of the Science in Universal Design* feature recent developments and

technology that pertains to Universal Design, and organizes the chapters based on different types of institutions (Aquariums, Residential settings, etc.) and also includes information based on user evaluation. I will be primarily using Chapter 1 and Chapter 14. Chapter 1: Advancing Universal Design, which discusses recent advancements and standards worldwide and provides definitions for the most current terminology. Chapter 14: Moving Forward, which discusses the topics outlined at the 2008 Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Universal Design and the Built Environment (RERC-UD) State of the Science Conference and provokes thoughts on how UD might develop in the future. This source will benefit my project by providing new Universal Design trends to research further, helping me define key terms surrounding accessible design and universal design, and combining several US research sources into a single article.

McGinnis, R. (2007). Enabling education: Including people with disabilities in art museum programming. *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education in the 21st Century*, 138-149.

Rebecca McGinnis, Senior Museum Educator, Access and Community Programs at The Metropolitan Museum of Art wrote this article. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is a leader in accessible museum programming for a spectrum of people with disabilities. This article discusses statistical information about the disability population (although someone dated at this point) and why museums should be accommodating the needs of this population. She outlines the seven principles of Universal Design from the Center for Universal Design and describes Educational Programming and Universal Design principles. This article will benefit my research by providing a guide for best practices for including people with disabilities in programming while also supporting my ADA and UD research for background information.

McMillen, R. (2012). The inclusive art museum: Determining disability access. *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 4(1), 101-115.

This essay discusses the implementation of *Everyone's Welcome: The Americans with Disabilities Act and Museums*, written by John P.S. Salmen (and published by the American Alliance of Museums) in a Midwestern contemporary art museum. This article proves the effectiveness of Salmen's nine-step strategy for implementing an accessibility policy. This resource is relevant to my paper as a possible tool that my nonprofit can use to evaluate existing and create new accessibility initiatives. The article also argues that by implementing Salmen's nine-step strategy, museums will provide richer experiences for all audiences, not just people with disabilities. This is an argument for the greater benefit of inclusion practices in the museum and further proves the need for an accessibility consultant.

National Endowment for the Arts. (2003). *Design for accessibility, a cultural administrator's handbook*. Washington DC: National Endowment for the Arts.

This text, provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, encompasses all of the ways that cultural institutions can adhere to Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The authors of the handbook include NEA staff members, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (a national leader in the arts and disabilities) and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. The handbook describes its goal as “to provide guidance to cultural administrators on accessibility and inclusion for creating new or opening up existing programs to include individuals with disabilities and older adults, whether as staff, volunteers, program participants or audience members.” This all-encompassing handbook provides both introductory guides for implementing inclusion as well as in-depth legal and universal design statistics. Although the text was published in 2003, its words are still relevant. I like this text, because it is easy to reference since it breaks up information into small topics, such as legal policy, communication strategies, architectural access, staff training, marketing and includes information for many different types of disabilities. Each chapter concludes with a list of “best practices” for each topic and a glossary defining key terms and phrases that pertain to the ADA or disability statistics. It also provides sources to other government agencies that can help with planning (both physical spaces and programming). This handbook will serve as a reference to my paper on a number of accessibility topics and facts and provide the framework for creating my accessibility toolkit.

National Endowment for the Arts. (2003). *Accessibility planning and resource guide for cultural administrators*. Retrieved August 27, 2016, from <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/AccessibilityPlanningAll.pdf>

This source is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts as an online companion to its publication *Design for Accessibility, A Cultural Administrator's Handbook*. This guide provides step-by-step guidelines for implementing accessible design or programming into your institution. The text includes some of the same information as *Design for Accessibility*, but it also includes checklists and toolkits for designing programming or developing an internal access plan. It also helps define the role of an outside “evaluator” to assist in determining an institution’s accessibility. This chapter will be especially beneficial in determining the role and tasks of my consultant nonprofit. The NEA includes its “Arts and Humanities Accessibility Checklist” as a suggestion for performing a self-evaluation. This checklist was updated in 2013:

Reich, C. A. (2014). *Taking action toward inclusion: Organizational change and the inclusion of people with disabilities in museum learning* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Boston College.

This source is a doctoral dissertation that examines organizational change in science museums to include people with disabilities in various areas of the museum. The author uses three museums as case studies and includes interviews with staff members, people with disabilities and observation as data. The dissertation concludes with best practices for implementing long-term organizational changes of internal communication and promoting professional development. This paper benefits my research by providing a literature review of the “Social Model of Disability” and a synthesis of prior studies done inclusion of

people with disabilities and organizational change. In the Literature Review chapter of the paper, Reich also discusses the history of the Americans with Disabilities Act and a brief introduction to initiatives for inclusion in science museums. Reich provides the research framework for accessibility in the science museum field.

Salmen, J. S., & Universal Designers & Consultants, I. M. (1998). *Everyone's welcome: The Americans with Disabilities Act and museums*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums.

This text was published by the American Association of Museums (AAM), currently named the American Alliance of Museums, and serves as a manual for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It includes the AAM standards for accessibility, which will be beneficial in clarifying the ADA compliance that is specific to museums. *Everyone's Welcome* includes strategies for multiple museum perspectives, such as universal exhibition design and customer service and offers solutions for a variety of disabilities. The paper suggests short-term fixes and long-term goals. Salmen provides his nine-step strategy to implementing and achieving accessibility. This manual, while nearly two decades old, is still a leading text for ADA compliance in museums, and even provides twenty additional pages of resources for reference. This text will help me define key terms and provides the building blocks for the goals of my accessibility consultant nonprofit, thanks to Salmen's easy nine-step guide.

Smith, H. J., Ginley, B., & Goodwin, H. (2012). Beyond compliance? Museums, disability and the law. *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*, R. Sandall, & E. Nightingale, eds, 59-71.

Smith, Ginley and Goodwin's chapter discusses the role of policy adherence in museums. They argue that museums should be doing more than complying with ADA standards and that legal requirements bring more attention to fulfilling the bare minimum versus fostering a genuine concern for inclusion. The chapter also describes the three tiers of museum accessibility according to Lonnie Bunch (National Museum of African American History & Culture) and Janice Majewski (Institute of Human Centered Design). These tiers are Access to the physical environment (architectural barriers), access to the museum's content (interpretation of exhibition and education), and access to history and culture (including the experiences and opinions of people with disabilities). The chapter goes on to suggest ways that museums can increase access to all three tiers. This source was valuable to my research by providing a platform and offering solutions for including people with disabilities in every aspect of the museum. The three tiers of access helped inform the goals and objectives of the project.

*Smithsonian guidelines for accessible exhibition design*. (n.d.). Retrieved August 28, 2016, from <http://si.edu/Accessibility/SGAED>

The Smithsonian published this document which provides guidelines for designing exhibitions to be accessible for people with disabilities. The guidelines include standards for physical exhibition space, written publications, and audio-visual presentations. While my paper will not discuss exhibition design in-depth, this document will serve as a

reference to universal design best practices. The text provides the national standards for text size, language, acceptable mounting height and width between spaces for exhibition furniture as well as a glossary of key terms. The Smithsonian's guidelines provide images and figures for reference. This document is a well-known accessibility reference and will provide statistics and data for my literature review, and serve as a reference when compiling checklists for an accessibility toolkit.

Starr, R. E. (2016). *Accessibility practices & the inclusive museum: Legal compliance, professional standards, and the social responsibility of museums* (Bachelor's Thesis, Rochester Institute of Technology). Accessed from <http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses/9231>

Starr's thesis explores the ways that art museums engage visitors with disabilities. The author focuses on the social responsibility museums have as opposed to satisfying legal obligations. The paper serves as a literature review that investigates different types of accessibility implementations in the field and presents case studies of three New York City museums, The Guggenheim, Museum of Modern Art, and The Whitney Museum of American Art. This source is relevant to my paper by providing an evolution of accessibility efforts in museums over the past 30 years, and discussing three in-depth initiatives that promote inclusive practices in the museum.

Stevens, G. (2015). Museums and ADA@25: A look back. *Museum*, 94(5), 26-27.

Greg Stevens is the assistant director for professional development at American Alliance of Museums (AAM). His article appears in the Fall 2015 issue AAM's magazine *Museum*, which celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The article provides a historical overview of the ADA and describes seminal programming that was happening before the passage of the legislation in 1990.

*2010 ADA standards for accessible design. [electronic resource]* (2010). Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice.

This document is an update to the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, exhibiting revisions to the standards included in Titles I & II, which include the guidelines for new and existing public accommodations and commercial structures. This document will serve as a reference to my paper by presenting the most up-to-date accessible guidelines from the Department of Justice.

## Appendix B: Stakeholders

### MuseumAbility Consulting Staff Members

During the initial phases of the business, the staff will likely consist of only one person – the owner. Their role will be to establish the organization as a business, fund the initial phases, market, and prospect to potential clients, and perform the consulting duties of the company. MuseumAbility staff will be experts on the requirements and standards outlined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Universal Design best practices, disability etiquette, museum practices, and programming. The staff will be paid with funds received from the services performed after operating expenses are disbursed, and a percentage of the profits are distributed back into the bottom line. As the business grows, there may be an opportunity to employ more staff members, such as a part-time bookkeeper, additional consulting partners, and possibly assistants.

### Disability Community Advisory Board

MuseumAbility will recruit members of the disability community to create a community advisory board. Members of the board will serve as advisors to MuseumAbility projects, to ensure that the voices of the community are represented. Members will be acquired on an ongoing basis, beginning in the early stages of business development. To start, board members will be located in the same city as MuseumAbility, however, as the company expands, members may be recruited nationally. Board membership will be voluntary. Depending on the success of the company, an option to compensate the board may arise. The board will be representative of a variety of different disabilities, providing a range of experiences and opinions on best practices and etiquette. Members of this board will also be well-connected to their communities, offering the ability to provide audience for pilot testing programming or a network for potential volunteers and employees.

### Museums and Cultural Institutions

MuseumAbility will provide their consulting services to museums and cultural institutions (clients). During the start-up phase, these institutions will be located within proximity to MuseumAbility's headquarters, with the option to expand nationally as the company grows. MuseumAbility will serve all types of museums and cultural institutions including but not limited to, art, science, and history museums, zoos, aquariums, gardens, and historic houses. Initially, clients will be acquired during a period of prospecting in which MuseumAbility will reach out to a list of potential clients. As the company grows, clients may request services directly from MuseumAbility.

The clients will first perform a self-evaluation, a checklist designed by MuseumAbility to determine what level of compliance or accessibility efforts are already in place. Next, MuseumAbility will conduct an assessment of facilities, services, programs, and administration. Department leadership will be needed for participation in this process. The client will advise on their accessibility needs, budget and organizational ability.



MuseumAbility will then submit a report and proposal to the institution, with fees and a schedule of services that meet the needs and budget of the client. MuseumAbility will take a small percentage of their outsourced consulting compensation as an administrative fee. MuseumAbility will perform its agreed upon services, working with the staff, board and leadership of the museum.

### Outsourced Experts

MuseumAbility will utilize a team of experts if the scope of individual projects lies outside of its staff's ability. The outsourced experts will provide additional consultant services and will be paid a fee by MuseumAbility after funds are collected from the client. Experts might include, but not limited to:

- Architectural Specialist  
Clients who seek to make improvements to their facilities or remove architectural barriers will be referred to an architect or construction person who specializes in ADA compliance.
- Web Accessibility Specialist  
Clients looking to improve their website or digital accessibility efforts will be paired with a web accessibility specialist who can create, test and implement accessible website or design features. This specialist will be an expert on the most up-to-date design practices.
- Exhibition/Universal Design Specialist  
MuseumAbility may partner with an exhibition design specialist for special exhibit requests. This specialist will be an expert on universal design standards.
- Legal Experts  
If clients need specific legal guidance for policy writing or adherence, MuseumAbility may outsource services to an ADA law expert who can further advise on the matters at hand.

### The Disability Community

MuseumAbility provides services that will engage and include people with disabilities. 56.7 million people in the United States identify as having a disability. This community will benefit from the programs and services that MuseumAbility provides to its clients. The role of people with disabilities is to use the accessible features and participate in accessible programming offered by each client. Members of the community may also serve as volunteers or employees if clients continue to adopt inclusive practices.

## Appendix C: Accessibility Coordinator Job Description

The following text is an excerpt from the National Endowment for the Arts' Accessibility Planning and Resource Guide for Cultural Administrators (2003, p. 46 - 47).

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### **Standard Job Description for the Accessibility Coordinator (formerly called the 504/ADA Coordinator)**

The following job description for an Accessibility Coordinator is meant to serve as a guide for all cultural organizations, including state, regional and local cultural agencies. When preparing your organization's job description, be sure to consult with the appropriate department in your state, e.g., Division of Personnel Services.

- **Establish an Access Advisory Committee.** Create and staff an advisory committee that includes people with various disabilities, staff and board members.
- **Educate [your organization] on access issues.** Work with the Access Advisory Committee to develop and conduct periodic awareness seminars and training for staff, board, panelists and grantees.
- **Conduct a self-evaluation and create a transition plan.** Work with the Access Advisory Committee to conduct evaluation of [your organization's] policies, programs, services and facilities to identify where access improvements are needed. Create a self-evaluation document and transition plan (if needed). Use this evaluation to eliminate any physical, programmatic and policy barriers, as required by law.
- **Insure that access issues are integrated into the daily operation of [your organization],** including budget, policy, education and public information. Insure that the staff implements access considerations in their specific area of specialization, including funding guidelines, panels and other meetings.
- **Educate and assist contractors and grantees** (including service groups) in implementing access services and policies. Work with grantees/constituents to organize and convene access education seminars as separate meetings or as a part of other meetings. The ultimate goal is to make access part of all education efforts.
- **Budget for accessibility.** Work with staff and board to ensure access accommodations and services are budgeted, and are provided for in all activities undertaken by [your organization] and by its grant recipients. You may also work with staff to develop special funding initiatives that encourage and assist grantees with accessibility.
- **Develop and implement a grievance procedure** for dealing with any complaints, and keep staff and board members updated on its progress. (See Step 5).

- **Ensure representation on staff, board and panels.** Encourage the inclusion of individuals with disabilities from arts and humanities disciplines (such as artists, museum professionals, librarians, media makers) and cultural administrators. Encourage staff and others to consider qualified individuals with disabilities for staff, panelists and board members.
- **Outreach.** Maintain good working relationships and attend meetings of organizations representing people with disabilities and older adults.
- **Act as a resource/referral, and develop resource lists.** Working with your Access Advisory Committee to research and compile a directory of access services and equipment within your locality would be helpful to staff, grantees and others. Update resources list periodically or as needed.
- **Ensure that the Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan are implemented,** and update staff and board on its progress, through ongoing work with your Access Advisory Committee (See Step 4).
- **Follow up.** Meet with staff on a regular basis to discuss access issues, including panel composition (representation of people with disabilities on panels), budget, the state of access among constituents/grantees, access needs within [your organization], new access developments/technologies, and universal access to programs and activities. Work with staff to ensure that services are appropriately provided to board, staff, panelists, grantees and applicants.
- **Use the appropriate sections of this *Guide*** to assist with implementation.

## Appendix D: Proposed Start Up Expenses

**MuseumAbility Consulting, LLC – Start-Up Budget**

1/1/17

| <b>ONE-TIME EXPENSES</b>                  | <b>Date to Pay</b> | <b>Estimated Cost</b> | <b>Actual Cost</b> |
|---|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Office Supplies                           | 3/31/17            | \$200.00              |                    |
| Stationary / brand materials              | 3/31/17            | \$175.00              |                    |
| Equipment / furniture                     | 2/28/17            | \$500.00              |                    |
| Computer Equipment                        | 3/31/17            | \$1,500.00            |                    |
| Computer Software                         | 3/31/17            | \$230.00              |                    |
| Business Licenses/Permits/Fees            | 5/31/17            | \$195.00              |                    |
| Professional Services - Legal, Accounting | 2/28/17            | \$1,000.00            |                    |
| Advertising/Promotion/Web Site            | 8/31/17            | \$400                 |                    |
| Miscellaneous                             |                    |                       |                    |
| <b>Total One-Time</b>                     |                    | <b>\$4,200</b>        | <b>-</b>           |

| <b>MONTHLY EXPENSES</b>                   | <b>Estimated Cost</b> | <b>Actual Cost</b> | <b>Annual Cost</b> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Printing and supplies                     | \$20.00               |                    | \$240              |
| Telephone/Internet Expense                | \$100.00              |                    | \$1,200            |
| Advertising/Promotion                     | \$50.00               |                    | \$600              |
| Website                                   | \$14.00               |                    | \$168              |
| Postage/Shipping                          | \$20.00               |                    | \$240              |
| Office Supplies                           | \$30.00               |                    | \$360              |
| Communication/Telephone                   | \$60.00               |                    | \$720              |
| Utilities                                 | \$100.00              |                    | \$1,200            |
| Dues and Subscriptions                    | \$300.00              |                    | \$300              |
| Liability Insurance (over 12 months)      | \$33.33               |                    | \$400              |
| Interest Expense                          |                       |                    |                    |
| Bank Service Charges                      |                       |                    |                    |
| Repairs & Maintenance                     | \$100.00              |                    | \$100              |
| Professional Services - Legal, Accounting | \$50.00               |                    | \$600              |
| Travel & Entertainment                    | \$100.00              |                    | \$1,200            |
| Conferences, professional meetings        | \$1,500.00            |                    | \$1,500            |
| Business Savings                          | % of profits          |                    |                    |
| Professional Development                  | \$1,000.00            |                    | \$1,000            |
| Salary                                    | % of profits          |                    |                    |
| Miscellaneous                             |                       |                    |                    |
| <b>Total Monthly Expenses</b>             | <b>\$3,477.33</b>     |                    | <b>\$9,828</b>     |

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